

VZCZCXRO5150  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0599/01 0671128  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 081128Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2046  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0076  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000599

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2029  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CDA, CG AND PM DISCUSS INITIAL DRAWDOWN OF US  
FORCES, FOREIGN FIGHTERS, AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND RECENT  
VISIT BY FORMER IRANIAN PRESIDENT RAFSANJANI

REF: 09BAGHDAD553

BAGHDAD 00000599 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

11. (S) Summary: In their regular weekly meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on March 5, Charge d' Affaires (CDA) Butenis and Commanding General (CG) MNF-I Odierno discussed the initial drawdown of U.S. forces, foreign fighters, airport development, and former Iranian President Rafsanjani's recent visit to Iraq. The CG advised that on March 8 he planned to announce the initial withdrawal of approximately 12,500 U.S. forces from Iraq between now and July. The PM, as was the case in their last meeting, expressed concern about the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Anbar, Ninawa, Salah ad Din and Diyala provinces, because he was concerned that al-Qaida Iraq (AQI) was awaiting the drawdown of U.S. forces from these areas in order to reconstitute operations there. The CG discussed a suspected foreign fighter and AQI financier who is being detained in Lebanon and who has a warrant from Iraq. The CG commented that he had not forgotten about Adel Mashadani, a corrupt former Sons of Iraq (SoI) leader, and noted that his capture would take place in coordination with Iraqi Security Forces in a way that would avoid civilian casualties. The CDA asked the PM if former Iranian President Rafsanjani's visit to Iraq was significant, to which the PM replied that they had not discussed any substantive issues. End Summary.

12. (C) At the opening of the meeting, the CG asked PM al-Maliki about his upcoming trip to Australia on March 10. The PM lamented about the "long trip" ahead, noting he did not like to travel, but stated that it was a necessary courtesy for the significant contributions that Australian forces had made to the Coalition and training missions and reciprocity for the Australian PM's visit to Iraq and his assistance with irrigation and agricultural development.

-----  
Drawdown of U.S. Forces  
-----

13. (S) The CG remarked that he had received permission from Secretary of Defense Gates to announce the initial drawdown of approximately 12,500 U.S. forces from Iraq between now and July or August 2009 and that it would be announced in a joint U.S.- Iraqi press conference. The PM inquired as to whether the CG would announce from where in Iraq these forces would be withdrawn. The CG stated that he would not, to which the PM replied that he thought it was important that the locations not be announced. The CG noted that these forces will not be taken from any one area and that other forces will be shifted to fill any resulting gaps. The PM remarked, as he had done in their February 28 meeting, that he hoped

that forces would remain at current strength levels in Anbar, Ninawa, Salah ad Din and Diyala provinces at least until July. Expressing some concern over talk of the drawdown of U.S. forces, the PM cited rumors that AQI was waiting for the withdrawal of U.S. forces to announce its new leadership in Diyala province. The PM requested that he and the CG should have a joint planning session to discuss this matter in greater detail as MNF-I plans for the drawdown are finalized.

-----  
CG and PM Discuss Terror Suspects and Foreign Fighters  
-----

¶4. (S) The CG reported that a suspected al-Qaeda member, Q4. (S) The CG reported that a suspected al-Qaeda member, wanted in connection with terrorist financing, was currently in custody in Lebanon. The individual was suspected of aiding a known Syria-based terrorist facilitator with an attack on an Iraqi police station at ar-Rumnanah in May of last year, when he provided uniforms, weapons, and money in support of the attack. The CG and PM discussed the fact that there was an Iraqi warrant for the individual and that the process had started to have him moved from Lebanon to Iraq.

¶5. (S) PM al-Maliki offered to call the Lebanese PM in order to secure his transfer and said that the GoI was willing to take "personal delivery" of him if necessary. The CG replied that they should let the Iraqi, U.S., and Lebanese officials work out the details and only call if there is a problem effecting the transfer. CG Odierno noted that bringing him to justice in Iraq would send a strong signal that Iraq is serious about its pursuit of terror suspects. "We think that he is a very important person in the AQI network and we appreciate your help and cooperation in bringing him to justice," the CG told PM al-Maliki.

BAGHDAD 00000599 002.2 OF 002

¶6. (S) The PM asked the CG if he had any information on Iraqi or other foreign fighters training in Russia, commenting that he had been warned of this new "phenomenon." We know of training in Afghanistan, Syria and Iran, but we don't have any specific information on ongoing training in Russia, the CG replied. He said, however, that he would look into the matter more closely. The PM remarked that training in Russia could indicate some special kinds of weapon or tactics might soon be deployed in Iraq, adding that we know they are training - but asked for what purpose. The CG commented that training in Russia might be to target operations in Afghanistan, not Iraq.

¶7. (S) The CG remarked that he had not forgotten about Adel Mashadani. (Note: In their February 19 meeting, the CG and PM discussed Mashadani at length, reftel; end note.) The CG said that Mashadani is currently in Fadhl, where he has strong support, so U.S. forces are waiting for him to leave so that they can assist Iraqi forces in apprehending him without risking civilian casualties by going after him on his own ground. The PM agreed and said that he would be patient, noting that Mashadani was a ruthless individual that was abusing people and extorting money. The PM said that he used Saddam style tactics, killing anyone that he distrusted. The CG noted that he had heard similar reports and that he would go after Mashadani in Fadhl if he did not soon leave, reiterating his hope to avoid civilian casualties. The PM said Iraqi forces could go after Mashadani themselves, but he would be patient and wait for the CG to move.

-----  
An Airport Authority to Promote Foreign Investment  
-----

¶8. (S) The CG suggested that the PM consider creating an airport authority to manage and promote foreign investment in and around Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). The CG

suggested that Iraq should develop the airport and the surrounding area, but first needed to create an airport authority to promote foreign investment. The PM was unclear on the concept at first, noting that the jurisdiction for the airport was under the Ministry of Transportation (MoT) and that the MoT had recently solicited bids for various airport projects. The CG explained that the MoT was soliciting bids for aviation related contracts and that he was referring to foreign investment for building hotels, business offices and conference centers. The CG noted that the U.S., Abu Dhabi and Dubai all had this type of private sector airport authorities to manage and promote foreign investment, which caused the PM to state he was interested. The CG said that when he was the MNC-I Commander in Iraq, the USG spent \$12 million to build a hotel and to renovate the business and conference centers. An airport authority would expand this initiative by attracting foreign businesses and investment. "I think there is a lot of potential there," the CG concluded and suggested that U.S. experts come and brief the PM's Chief of Staff on the concept.

-----  
Iranian Delegation Visit to Iraq  
-----

19. (S) The CDA asked PM al-Maliki about the significance of the very large Iranian delegation visiting Iraq, led by former Iranian President Rafsanjani. The PM joked that they were essentially a large delegation of "pilgrims" - 250 of them, visiting the holy sites in Najaf and Karbala. He said that he had met with Rafsanjani, however, that they had not discussed any substantive issues. It was mostly general discussions about Sunni-Shia relations and the elections, but had covered nothing of substance, he said. The PM mentioned that he had wanted to discuss various items of concern including Iraq's need for normal water flow from Iran and the disputed boundary in the Shatt al Arab, but that he didn't both because Rafsanjani was not a member of the inner circle of the Iranian government and because Rafsanjani had no interest in discussing anything substantive. He added that Rafsanjani had met with President Talabani also, but that he did not know what had been discussed in that meeting.  
BUTENIS